

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 COME-00 EB-07

LAB-04 SIL-01 AID-05 USIE-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 5304

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, ELAB, AR

SUBJECT: STRUGGLE TO REPLACE LASTIRI NOW MAJOR POLITICAL BATTLE

REF: BA-5186

SUMMARY. THE BATTLE WITHIN JUSTICIALIST RANKS TO NAME REPLACEMENT FOR RAUL LASTIRI AS CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES PRESIDENT HAS INTENSIFIED IN PAST FEW DAYS. MRS. PERON, BY TELLING PERONIST DEPUTIES THEY SHOULD, AS MATTER OF PARTY LOYALTY, ELECT HER CHOSEN CANDIDATE, NICASIO SANCHEZ TORANZO, HAS PLACED HER REMAINING POLITICAL PRESTIGE ON LINE. INTERIOR MIN BENITEZ, WHO REPORTEDLY URGED MRS. PERON TO BACK SANCHEZ TORANZO, NOW CLEARLY STRONG MAN IN HER CABINET. WHILE OSTENSIBLY INTERNAL PARTY MATTER, ISSUE OF CHOOSING NEW CHAMBER PRESIDENT NOW A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE AFFECTING AND INVOLVING ALL KEY POLITICAL AND LABOR SECTORS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE BATTLE TO NAME THE SUCCESSOR TO RAUL LASTIRI AS CHAMBER PRESIDENT NOW MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE IN COUNTRY. SPECTACLE OF MAJORITY PARTY SQUABBLING OVER TWO WEEKS ON INTERNAL PARTY ISSUE WHILE PRESS HEADLINES BANNER IMPENDING ECONOMIC DISASTER FURTHER TARNISHING MRS. PERON'S ADMINISTRATION AND INCREASING DOUBTS OF WHETHER
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GOVERNMENT WILL BE ABLE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH ECONOMIC

CRISIS.

2. UNTIL MRS. PERON DIRECTLY ENTERED FRAY BY TELLING DEPUTIES THEY SHOULD ELECT TUCUMAN DEPUTY NICASIO SANCHEZ TORANZO, A LAST DITCH SUPPORTER OF RAUL LASTIRI, LABOR AND POLITICAL WING ANTI-VERTICALISTAS APPEARED TO HAVE MUSTERED MAJORITY TO ELECT MODERATE CONGRESSMAN ENRIQUE OSELLA MUNOZ. WITH MRS. PERON'S BACKING, A MOVE REPORTEDLY URGED BY INTERIOR MIN BENITEZ, THE VERTICALISTAS HAVE GAINED SUPPORT AND APPEAR TO HAVE VOTES TO ELECT SANCHEZ TORANZO. STRUGGLE HAS BECOME MORE BITTER AND WHATEVER OUTCOME OF FINAL VOTE UNITY OF PERONISTS IN CONGRESS BADLY STRAINED.

3. BACKBONE OF ANTI-VERTICALISTAS HAS BEEN LABOR WING OF PERONISTS WITHIN CONGRESS. DESPITE FACT THAT 62 ORGANIZATIONS LEADER LORENZO MIGUEL APPARENTLY STRUCK DEAL WITH BENITEZ TO SUPPORT VERTICALISTA POSITION, LABOR CONGRESSMEN HAVE TO DATE REFUSED TO CAVE IN ON THIS ISSUE. WIN OR LOSE THEY ARE NOW TALKING ABOUT A SPECIAL MEETING OF 62 ORGANIZATIONS TO CARRY FIGHT TO MIGUEL ON HIS HOME GROUND. LABOR SOURCES ADVISE THAT OVER 60 PERCENT OF 62 ORGANIZATIONS AFFILIATES OPPOSE MIGUEL ON THIS ISSUE. FOR LABOR, CONGRESSIONAL STRUGGLE HAS NOW OPENED UP MANY OLD AND NEW WOUNDS WHICH WILL NOT EASILY HEAL.

4. BENITEZ WHO HAS STEERED EFFORTS OF VERTICALISTA FACTION IS NOW STRONG MAN IN A WEAK CABINET. EMBASSY SOURCES REPORT THAT HE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN RALLYING VERTICALISTAS IN CONGRESS AND HAVING MRS. PERON GIVE UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT TO SANCHEZ TORANZO. BENITEZ'S MOVES IN CONGRESSIONAL DEBATE ARE SEEN AS PART OF HIS DRIVE TO ASSUME ROLE OF "PRIME MINISTER" WITHIN CABINET. WITH LUDER IN WINGS WAITING TO TAKE OVER IF BENITEZ'S EFFORTS TO SHORE UP MRS. PERON FAIL, IT IS NOW VITAL FOR HIS STRATEGY THAT MRS. PERON REMAIN IN OFFICE. WHETHER HE CAN PUT TOGETHER POLITICAL BASE FOR HIS PLAN TO WORK IS STILL AN OPEN QUESTION WHICH CONGRESSIONAL BATTLE WILL ONLY PARTLY ANSWER.

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5. UCR AND MILITARY ARE TAKING PUBLIC POSITION THAT CONGRESSIONAL BATTLE IS AN INTERNAL PERONIST ISSUE. PRIVATELY UCR HAS BENT EVERY EFFORT TO SUPPORT ANTI-VERTICALISTA POSITION. KEY UCR SOURCE TOLD EMBOFF THAT IF BENITEZ-VERTICALISTA COALITION WINS, IT IS NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO FACE SOCIAL-ECONOMIC UPHEAVALS COUNTRY FACES. SAME SOURCE SAID THAT IF ANTI-ERTICALISTAS LOSE BATTLE HE FEARED IT WOULD INCREASE PRESSURE ON MILITARY TO

INTERVENE. (NOTE: AS CABLE BEING PREPARED ANTI-VERTICALISTA PERONIST TOLD EMBOFF THAT SANCHEZ TORANZO HAD SECURED VOTES TO ENSURE HIS ELECTION AS CHAMBER PRESIDENT. FORMAL VOTE EXPECTED LATER THIS WEEK.)

COMMENT: PRESENT SITUATION ONE OF INCREASING CONFUSION. IMAGE OF POLITICIANS FIGHTING AT CAPTAIN'S TABLE WHILE SHIP SINKS IS WIDELY SHARED IMAGE AMONG GENERAL PUBLIC. INDEED OUR ANALYSIS MAY GIVE MORE COHERENCE TO PROCESS THAN IT MERITS.

NOTE - REFERENCE FRNMIN VIGNES, AFTERNOON DAILY LA RAZON OF AUGUST 6 REPEATS CLARIN STORY CARRIED FBIS SPECULATING ON EARLY RESIGNATION VIGNES. EMBASSY HAS REPORTED ON VIGNES' PROBLEMS BUT CANNOT CONFIRM LATEST RESIGNATION STORIES. DESPITE THOSE RUMORS, AMB AND MRS. HILL HAVE ACCEPTED LUNCHEON ENGAGEMENTS ON AUG 14 AND 20 WITH THE VIGNES. HILL

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